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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0457
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1295
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0364
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC

UNCLAS COTONOU 000450

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W DORSEY LOCKHART
PARIS FOR BKANEDA
LONDON FOR PETER LORD
MCC FOR JBLOOM

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KMCA](#) [BN](#)
SUBJECT: BENIN: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AT STANDSTILL

REF: (A) COTONOU 420 (B) COTONOU 201 (C) COTONOU 151

1. (U) SUMMARY: Since July 7th deputies from the G4 and G13 (Ref B) have blocked all deliberations in the National Assembly. The deputies, who form a majority, demand the creation of an independent commission to investigate National Assembly President Mathurin Nago's management of the Assembly. They also demand the installation of all the remaining municipal councils which have not yet been seated following the April 20 municipal elections. This blockage endangers several government priorities including the construction of defenses against coastal erosion (Ref C), a bill for which must be approved by July 31. In response the Yayi government has seated 9 of the 24 outstanding councils and opened discussions with former President Nicephore Soglo of the Renaissance of Benin party. END SUMMARY.

National Assembly President in Trouble

2.(U) On July 7, at an ordinary session of the National Assembly, deputies of the opposition G4, G13 and Key Force group voted down, in a heated debate, the session's agenda because it did not include a proposal for an investigative committee which they initially introduced to look into Nago's management of the National Assembly. As a result of this conflict, the first three-month ordinary session of the National Assembly adjourned on July 8, without deputies approving the bills on the agenda. Subsequently, opposition deputies boycotted the extraordinary sessions that Nago convened respectively on July 14 and 17 to examine and approve outstanding pending bills including a bill authorizing the credit agreements necessary for a coastal erosion prevention project east of Cotonou (Ref C).

3.(U) The threat of a vote of no confidence has hovered over Nago since February 2008 as the opposition faults him for pushing President Yayi's policy at the National Assembly, too vigorously which they consider a threat to the legislature's prerogatives. The proposed investigative committee appears to be the opposition's first step towards engineering Nago's dismissal.

President Yayi Responds

4.(SBU) On July 9, President Yayi met with the Presidents Conference of the National Assembly (a grouping of that body's leaders). According to Ephiphane Quenum, a deputy from the Renaissance of Benin party who was present at the meeting, discussions focused mainly on the installation of mayors in the remaining 24 communes in which the government suspended installation due to allegations of election fraud and protests. Subsequently Issa Demole Moko, the Minister of Decentralization, Local Authority and Planning,

announced that the Government had resumed installation of city councils in 9 of the 24 disputed communes. Nevertheless, at the July 17 parliamentary session the opposition majority deputies voted to continue to postpone all legislative action and threatened to block consideration of all new legislation until the government inaugurated councilors in the remaining 13 communes.

Comment

5.(SBU) COMMENT: The opposition deputies in the National Assembly increasingly constrain President Yayi's room for political maneuver. He needs their cooperation to pass important legislation, both for the coastal erosion bill and the legal code and land title reforms which are necessary for Millennium Challenge Account (MCA)-Benin's programs to move forward. The opposition clearly senses an opportunity to put Yayi on the defensive after two years of watching him implement his program unimpeded. Yayi has little other choice than to decide to follow the advice of some (Ref A) and begin to negotiate with the opposition. The path of negotiation might prove particularly fruitful if he conducts it with those, like former President Nicephore Soglo, who are relatively untainted by the accusations of corruption which plague the leaders of other political parties. Yayi also needs to move to seat the remaining municipal councils without further delay. END COMMENT.

BROWN